

ENSURING THAT HOMELESS PEOPLE HAVE INCOMES TO PAY FOR HOUSING

GOAL: When it is necessary in order to obtain housing, your community assists homeless people to secure enough income to afford rent, by rapidly linking them with employment and/or benefits. It also connects them to opportunities for increasing their incomes after housing placement (opportunities provided primarily by mainstream programs).

Most homeless people will reenter housing without the benefit of a deep housing subsidy. For them, rehousing cannot occur without income. The quicker a minimal income is obtained, the sooner a new home is possible.

Many of the employment models explored as part of welfare reform show how people can quickly obtain work, in many instances paying enough to afford a minimal rent. In order to stabilize housing, however, people who have been rehoused must be linked with longer-term, career-based employment services, giving them the tools they need to increase their earnings. In locations with higher rent levels, this will sometimes be necessary even to initially escape from homelessness. Mainstream systems such as those funded by the federal government under the Workforce Investment Act should be used for this purpose.

Many homeless people are unable to work due to a disability, or unable to quickly earn enough to afford rent. They are often eligible for cash assistance from Supplemental Security Income, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or similar programs. Systems should be in place to work through the eligibility processes in these programs as quickly as possible. This may require exceptions to local TANF procedures, which in some places involve discouraging people from applying for benefits. These exceptions are worthwhile, however, because of the increased self-sufficiency that comes about as a result of more stable housing.

Examples

The Maryland SSI Outreach Project (Baltimore, Maryland) This project assists homeless people with disabilities in establishing their eligibility for Supplemental Security Income benefits. The project helps compile medical records and packages them with an eye to demonstrating compliance with SSI eligibility requirements. A profile is at: <http://www.endhomelessness.org/best/mdssioutrch.htm>.

STRIVE (New York, New York) Strive provides short-term job readiness training, seeking to help people overcome barriers to employment and obtain a job. STRIVE follows up with its clients after the job begins. A brief description and contact information are at: <http://www.endhomelessness.org/best/bpst.htm>.

Impact Employment Services (Boston, Massachusetts) Impact Employment Services is a citywide employment service for homeless people. It assists with job searches and placement to help homeless people obtain a job quickly and at the highest pay possible. A description is at: <http://www.endhomelessness.org/best/IMPACT.htm>